

JANUARY 23, 2012

Parashat Bo

Serious Warnings

I will bring...locusts in your midst (Exodus 10:4)

הנני מביא מחר...ארבה בגבולך (שמות י:ד)

After the first seven plagues devastated Egypt, how could Pharaoh have been so foolish as to question whether God would follow through with the plague of locusts and destroy the Egyptian economy? According to Ohr Hachayyim (on 10:7), Pharaoh doubted whether or not God could actually enact such a plague. Pharaoh's doubts stemmed from his understanding that God wanted to free the Jews from Egypt. Yet, instead of making that demand, Moses only requested permission to allow the Jews to travel for three days in the desert to worship God. Concluding that Moses did not have the power to coerce him to free the Israelites, and confident that Moses could not follow through on his threats, Pharaoh ignored Moses' warnings.

Because Pharaoh believed that there were no consequences for his actions, he led Egypt on a path to financial ruin. Sadly, a similar attitude by the Iranian leadership could lead them to close the Strait of Hormuz and further damage their beleaguered economy.

With the enactment and enforcement of a new round of sanctions on the Iranian regime, meant to deter Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons, the Islamic Republic threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, a strategically crucial waterway where about a fifth of the world's oil trade flows through on a daily basis. Relying on a secret channel of communication, the Obama administration warned Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, that closing the Strait of Hormuz is a "red line" that would provoke an American response, according to [The New York Times](#). Ironically, closing the strait could have a greater negative impact on Iran than the West. In a separate article [The New York Times](#) reported that "Iran's own shaky economy relies on exporting at least two million barrels of oil a day through the strait...according to Energy Department analysts." Administration officials and Iran analysts say they continue to believe that Iran's threats to close the strait were bluster and an attempt to drive up the price of oil. According to Dennis Ross, former Middle East advisor to President Obama, by closing the straight "They [the Iranians] would basically be taking a vow of poverty with themselves." For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

By ignoring Moses' warnings Pharaoh acted irresponsibly and brought great harm to Egypt as a result. The time has come for Iran to learn from Pharaoh's mistake, begin acting responsibly, quit threatening the West and most importantly end its nuclear weapons program. ■

Sharing the Light

And there was a thick darkness (Exodus 10:22)

ויהי חושך (שמות י:כב)

The Torah notes that despite the fact that the plague of darkness prevented the Egyptians from either seeing or moving for three days, "all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (10:23). Moreover, according to the Midrash (Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer 19), during the plague, "When an Israelite would come next to an Egyptian to speak with him, the light would come with him, and when he would leave, the light would leave with him. And why was this so? So that the Egyptians would not say, 'The Israelites also sit in darkness.'" The special nature of the darkness meant that if an Israelite chose to do so, he could share his light with an Egyptian and allow the Egyptian to see while in his midst.

The light that the Israelites brought with them temporarily allowed the Egyptians to see. Thousands of years later, Israelis outshine their ancestor's ability by using their knowledge and expertise to permanently bring vision to people around the world.

Israeli doctors have recently restored the eyesight of more than 2,000 people in 7 countries: Nepal, Myanmar, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Cambodia, the Maldives and Ethiopia, [Ynet](#) reported. Israeli ophthalmologists performed the surgeries in special camps set up by MASHAV, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation, in collaboration with the Eye from Zion organization and the Kahn Foundation. "Eye Camps is a special operation aimed at restoring the eyesight of patients in developing countries which have no infrastructure for eye surgery. Israel sends a team of ophthalmologists who for two weeks perform cataract, oculoplastics and sight restoring surgical operations on dozens of patients." Another example of Israeli doctors working to restore sight is the story of a pro-Israel Christian pastor from Uganda who was attacked with acid. According to the [Jewish Tribune](#), when Umar Mulinde, a Christian convert from Islam, had acid poured on his face in an apparently religiously motivated attack, Professor Zeev Rotstein, director of The Chaim Sheba Medical Center in Israel, offered to provide acute and rehabilitative care to Mulinde at no charge. As Rotstein stated, "Healing is deeply ingrained in Jewish history and tradition. So it was only natural that we agreed to help Pastor Mulinde."

During the plague of darkness, the Jewish people were only able to provide light for Egyptians when directly in their presence. Today, by contrast, the people of Israel are able to give the gift of light—and sight—to the world. ■

Self-Serving Hypocrisy

And bless me also (Exodus 12:32)

וּבְרַכְתֶּם גַּם אוֹתִי (שְׁמוֹת יב:לב)

When the plague death of the firstborn struck the Egyptian nation, Pharaoh sought out Moses to forcibly expel the Jewish nation from his country. Finally granting Moses and the Jews permission to leave, he begged Moses to "Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also" (12:32). After everything he had just experienced, why did Pharaoh ask Moses for his blessing? Rashi (on 12:32) explains that this request was self-serving. Pharaoh asked Moses and Aaron, "Pray for me that I not die, for I am a firstborn." After having refused for months to allow the Jews to worship God, when he felt personally threatened Pharaoh not only allowed the Jews to worship freely, but he had the audacity to ask that they pray for him as well.

Pharaoh demonstrated galling hypocrisy by first refusing to allow the Israelites to worship and then asking that they pray on his behalf. Recently, Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah provided a similar display of self-serving hypocrisy.

After United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon expressed concern over the growing military prowess of Hizballah, the Iranian-backed terrorist group's leader not only promised never to disarm, but actually gloated over Ban's concern, [Agence France Presse](#) reported. "I felt happy when I heard that he (Ban) said he was concerned about our military power," Nasrallah said. Yet, Nasrallah's hypocrisy reared its head when he addressed the notion of dialogue. Referring to suggestions that Hizballah enter into dialogue with the Lebanese government to define a unified defense strategy, Nasrallah rejected the notion entirely. "There are some who only want dialogue in order to disarm Hizballah. They will never achieve this goal." Yet, when addressing the citizen uprising in Syria, Nasrallah's attitude towards dialogue suddenly shifted: "We call on the Syrian opposition, both inside Syria and abroad, to respond to Assad's calls for dialogue and cooperate to implement reform." It is not surprising that the head of a terrorist network would support the Assad regime. Nonetheless, Nasrallah's brazen, hypocritical attitude is sobering.

Pharaoh rejected the notion of Jews praying to God until he himself needed Moses' prayers. Hizballah mimics this hypocrisy when it rejects the notion of dialogue when it counters its interests, but lauds this idea when dialogue might help its brutal Syrian ally. ■